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VI.—THE TRANSLATION OF ANGLO-SAXON POETRY.

It is more than sixty years since Professor CONYBEARE in his 'Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1826)' gave us metrical versions of certain specimens of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and such versions have been from time to time increased, until now a very considerable portion of this poetry has been clothed in a modern English dress, either in prose or in verse. The form that the translation should take has varied with the taste of the translator. THORPE, in his editions of the 'Codex Exoniensis' (1842) and of 'Béowulf' (1855), contented himself with an English prose version by half-lines in parallel columns with the text. KEMBLE, however, had previously published his prose translation of 'Béowulf' (1837) in a separate volume from the text. WACKERBARTH published in 1849 the first complete English verse translation of 'Béowulf,' using verses of three and four accents, riming irregularly, sometimes stanza-fashion, as in the opening lines:

Lo! We have learned in lofty Lays
The Gár-Danes Deeds in antient Days
And Ages past away,
The Glories of the Theod-Kings,
And how the valiant Aethelings
Bare them in Battle's Day.

WACKERBARTH, however, had carefully considered the form in which he should translate this poem, for he says expressly in his Preface (p. ix):

"Some may ask why I have not preserved the Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre. My reason is that I do not think the taste of

the English people would at present bear it. I wish to get my book read, that my countrymen may become generally acquainted with the epic of our ancestors wherewith hitherto they have been most generally unacquainted, and for this purpose it was necessary to adopt a metre suited to the language, whereas the alliterative metre, heavy even in German, a language much more fitted for it than ours, would in English be so heavy that few would be found to labor through a poem of even half the length of the *Béowulf's*-lay when printed in so unattractive a garb. Still, if the literary bent of this country should continue for some few years longer the course it has of late years pursued, it would be time to give this poem to the English people in English alliterative metre, and I shall be thankful to see it done."

It is true that modern taste has tended more and more to the revival of the archaic, both in words and forms, and the modern public has been familiarized with alliteration in the poems of WILLIAM MORRIS and others; but the next complete English verse translation of '*Béowulf*,' that of COL. LUMSDEN (1881, 2nd ed. 1883), adopted the ballad-measure with riming couplets' as follows:

Lo! we have heard of glory won by Gar-Dane Kings of old,
And mighty deeds the princes wrought. Oft with his warriors
bold,

Since first an outcast he was found, did Scyld the Scefing hurl
From their mead-benches many a folk, and frighted many an earl.

Miss HICKEY adopted this measure for her translation of "*The Battle of Maldon*" (*Academy*, 1885), tho' she had previously used the verse of six accents in her translation of "*The Wanderer*" (*Academy*, 1881), the verse used by WM. MORRIS in his '*Sigurd the Volsung*.' Professor F. B. GUMMERE gave us a translation of "*Widsith*" (*Modern Language Notes* for June, 1890), in verses of four accents, with frequent alliteration and without rime, thus illustrating the views expressed in his article on "*The Translation of Béowulf, and the Relations of Ancient and Modern English Verse*" (*American Journal of Philology*, vii, 46, 1886); and more recently Miss BROWN has translated several pieces of Anglo-Saxon poetry literally line-for-line without rime or rhythm, which pieces will be found in late numbers of *Poet-Lore*. I do not pretend to enumerate the various forms of verse that have been used to translate Anglo-Saxon poetry, but I mention the above merely as illustrations of different kinds

of verse that translators have used. The German translators have in general preferred an alliterative accentual verse, as GREIN, in his 'Dichtungen der Angelsachsen,' and ETTMÜLLER, SIMROCK, and VON WOLZOGEN in their translations of 'Béowulf'; but from this HEYNE has varied in his translation of 'Béowulf,' having used the iambic pentameter, or verse of five accents without rime, that is, blank verse.

The subject has been but little discussed, the principal article that has come under my observation being that of Prof. GUMMERE, above-mentioned. The burden of this article is to show the unfitness of blank verse for the translation of 'Béowulf,' and to uphold the alliterative verse in modern English; but a large part of the article is taken up with the endeavor to deduce the heroic blank verse from the alliterative verse, which attempt, however well argued, does not carry conviction to my mind. This point, however, will not be discussed in the present paper. My object is to consider very briefly the most suitable measure in modern English verse for reproducing, with strict regard to literalness of translation, the impression produced on the mind of the ordinary reader by the rhythmical flow of the Anglo-Saxon verse, and in the final result I do not think that the views expressed will differ very far from those of Prof. GUMMERE. I do not forget that some years ago, in a review of COL. LUMSDEN'S translation of 'Béowulf' (*Amer. Jour. of Phil.*, ii, 355, October, 1881), I remarked that the most suitable measure for a poet to use in translating 'Béowulf' is the Miltonic blank verse, and I still think *that* verse a suitable vehicle for a poet to use in translating Anglo-Saxon poetry, for a poet is not limited to extreme literalness of translation, and is at liberty to disregard the particular rhythmical flow for the sake of the general effect. No one will pretend that the Miltonic blank verse reproduces the *rhythmical* movement of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, but the impression made by it is well-suited to tell of the noble deeds of valiant warriors, and it well deserves its name "heroic verse."

It is not necessary for my purpose to discuss the theories that have been advanced by German scholars as to the structure of Anglo-Saxon verse. The field has for some time been divided between the advocates of the *Vierhebungstheorie* and the *Zweihebungstheorie*, that is, the *four*-accents to

the half-verse and the *two*-accents, with preponderance of opinion in favor of the latter. But now comes Dr. HERMAN HIRT with his recent pamphlet, based on the investigations of Professor SIEVERS, 'Untersuchungen zur West-germanischen Verskunst,' Part i (1889), which discusses Anglo-Saxon Metre, and advocates *Dreihebungen* for the second half-verse, and *Drei-oder Vier-hebungen* for the first half-verse; that is, the second half-verse *always* contains three accents and the first half-verse three or four accents. This statement applies only to the normal verses, for the enlarged line, the *Schwellvers*, may have an additional accent in each half-verse. This is an intricate and technical subject, and I do not feel competent to speak of the matter with assurance without further and more thorough study of it than I have hitherto been able to give. But I have not yet seen any argument that would lead me to change an opinion formed some time ago, that the normal alliterative verse in Anglo-Saxon poetry consists of *two* strongly-accented initial syllables in each half-verse, both of those in the first half-verse and the first of the two in the second half-verse being capable of alliteration; in other words, I should favor the *Zweihebungs-theorie*. This was long ago stated by RIEGER as follows:

"Der vers . . . besteht aus zwei gleichen, durch den stabreim verbundenen gliedern von je zwei hebungen;"¹ that is, the verse consists of two similar members, bound together by alliteration, with two accents in each. In almost the same words the fact has been stated by Prof. SCHIPPER ('A. E. Metrik,' i, 46):

"Der regelmässige alliterierende Langvers besteht aus zwei durch den Stabreim verbundenen Gliedern oder Halbversen von je zwei Hebungen;" that is, the regular alliterating long-verse consists of two members or half-verses, bound together by the alliteration, with two accents in each. SCHIPPER says further (p. 47):

"The alliterating words are those words to which their grammatical value, and at the same time the connection of the discourse, lends a stronger accent than to the other words and syllables of the verse, all of which . . . stand in the thesis, that is, all, . . . in relation to the former, are unaccented."

¹ 'Die alt- und angelsächsische verskunst,' von MAX RIEGER. Halle, 18:5 (Page 3).

This is the view that seems to me to coincide best with the facts as I conceive them. How such half-verses as *gimmas stōdon*, or *gimmas hæfdon*, can have three or four accents passes my comprehension. Let us prefix the respective first half-verses to each: *begōten mid gólde*; *gimmas stōdon* ('Dream of the Rood,' 7), and *gegýred mid gólde*, *gimmas hæfdon* (D. R., 16). The alliterative syllables are naturally accented in reading the verses, and each of the second half-verses has an additional accent in the last place. The theory that will give accents to terminations of derivation and inflection does not produce to my ear a rhythmical flow. But all verses are not as plain sailing as the above, and similar verses, such as,

Wædum geweorðod[e] wýnnum seīnan; (15)
bewrigen[e] weorðlice weáldes trēow; (17)

still these furnish a model, and verses with an additional number of unaccented syllables between the accented syllables of each half-verse, or prefixed to the first accented syllable of each, may be accommodated to this movement by a more rapid utterance; for, as SCHIPPER says, "in relation to these [accented syllables], they are all unaccented." As to the enlarged line (*Schwellvers*) we may increase the number of accented syllables by one in each half-verse, not necessarily in both at the same time, but that is admissible.

It may be, as Prof. BRIGHT has suggested (*Amer. Jour. of Phil.*, vii, 104), too soon to say how Anglo-Saxon poetry should be translated, but whatever theory may be finally adopted as to the mechanical structure of Anglo-Saxon verse, it does not seem to me possible to observe in modern English verse a closer approach to that structure than an approximate imitation of the rhythm of the verse as read according to the two-accent theory. To accent always with equal stress both parts of a compound word, to give accentual stress to certain terminations and to deny it to others apparently of like weight, to allow certain words to have the stress and to deny it to others when standing in precisely the same relative position in the verse, to multiply successive accents without separation by unaccented syllables or by the cæsural pause,—all these features, however permissible in Old Teutonic verse, do not suit the rhythm of modern English verse, and I cannot so read Anglo-Saxon verse. I repeat, I am not denying the structure that more learned scholars claim

for Old Teutonic, especially Old High German verse, and by which they attempt to explain the structure of Anglo-Saxon verse, but I fail to see its application to Anglo-Saxon verse, and even if it does so apply, I think it incapable of reproduction in modern English verse. Here there is necessarily something subjective. I must take my own ear as my rhythmical guide, and regard the impressions made upon it as those received by the ordinary English ear. So reasoning, I must, as above stated, regard the general impression made by the rhythmical movement of the Anglo-Saxon verse as equivalent to that made in English verse by two strong accents to each half-verse, preceded or followed by one or more unaccented syllables, although sometimes such unaccented syllable is lacking in Anglo-Saxon verse and the two accents are consecutive; as

of ebrðwēge, æghwylc sǣwl (120).

Moreover, modern English verse does not readily admit more than two, or at most three, unaccented syllables between the accented syllables, whereas the number varies in Anglo-Saxon verse, and is often greater than three, especially before the first accented syllable of the second half-verse, in which part of the verse the longest anacrusis is admissible, as in the following verse :

biteres onbýrgan, swā hē tēr on ðæm béame dýde. (114).

To these statements it should be added that the two half-verses are separated by a well-marked cæsura, as seen in the examples given, and this must be retained in modern English verse in order to approximate to the rhythmical movement. This is such a marked characteristic that the older scholars printed the half-verses as separate lines, but the half-verses are so bound together by alliteration that it is better to print each verse as one line. The sequence of thought is usually such that the rhetorical pause and the cæsural pause coincide, but verses like the following are met with, where there is no rhetorical pause, though one may be made :

on þýsson lænan līfe gefétige, (138).

It will be observed that in this verse there is but one alliterative letter in the first half-verse, not two, as in the verses previously quoted. While three such alliterating letters in initial accented

syllables, prefixes being disregarded, constitute the full form of the verse, it is often the case that one of these alliterating letters is lacking, and either the first or the second may be lacking, as in the verse just read, and in the following verse :

gásta weðrode on gódes ríce (152).

It will also be observed that alliteration is avoided in the last accented place of the verse. It would be venturesome to affirm that it is *never* found there, but if so, it is rare and exceptional; therefore, I think that the following line in 'The Dream of the Rood' should be emended by the addition of *word*, or a word of like meaning :

ðð ðæt ic gehýrde, þæt hit hleððrode [word]; (26)

although all the editors print it as it stands without remark.

Seeing that alliteration is such a prominent mark of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the question arises should the translator try to secure it. By all means, I should say, if it can be secured without injuring exactness of translation and the rhythmical movement, both of which should be *first* sought, and if, by a reasonable effort, alliteration can also be obtained, so much the better. But it will be found very difficult to secure alliteration in English in translating Anglo-Saxon poetry, much more difficult than in German, for English has lost many of its older Teutonic words, especially of the poetic vocabulary, and its Romance words do not lend themselves so readily to alliteration. It is more difficult to secure alliteration in a translation than in an original poem, for in the latter the poet may accommodate his ideas to his words, whereas in the former the ideas are given, and the translator must seek those modern English words that will express most exactly the thought of the original writer, be they alliterative or not. While seeking alliteration, the temptation is to vary from the thought; hence I do not consider alliteration indispensable in the translation of Anglo-Saxon poetry. I should, therefore, regard a verse of *four* accents, two to each half-verse, with well-marked cæsural pause, and with alliteration, if readily attainable, as the best modern representative of the older verse. This, it seems to me, gives to the ear a rhythmical impression similar to that produced by the Anglo-Saxon verse, and, while rhythmical, the verse is not, in the modern sense, metrical; hence I should not apply to it the

terms derived from classical metres, iambic, anapaestic, trochaic, dactylic, which imply a more regular structure and a less free movement. I should prefer the line-for-line translation, for I think that by this the rhythmical movement can be better secured; but the demands of modern idiom must be taken into account, and if the line becomes ambiguous or unintelligible, this form must be abandoned. I should not adhere slavishly to it, if violence is done to modern idiom, or to the thought of the original; but, on the other hand, I regard inversion as permissible in verse, and I do not limit the translator to the observance of the usual prose order of words. Inversion is familiar enough in all English poetry, yet it is strange how some will stumble at it and criticise it. A little experience will render Anglo-Saxon inversions easy reading, and there is no occasion to avoid them if they help the rhythmical movement, unless they cause ambiguity in which case, as first stated, they should be avoided by the translator.

Another point must be considered by the translator, how far it is allowable to place in accented positions pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, and other light words ordinarily unaccented. It will be taken for granted that the translator should, as far as possible, place in accented positions words naturally accented on the root-syllable. These cause the voice to give the stress required for the rhythm, but it is sometimes very difficult to find them, keeping in mind the importance of expressing the exact idea of the original. Should then this last point be sacrificed to the attainment of ideal correctness of rhythm? I should say no, and I should allow the translator some liberty in this respect. This position can be sustained by the example of the Anglo-Saxon poets themselves, for example :

ac hīne pāer behēoldon hālige gāstas (11).

tō pām aēðelingē: ic paet eāll behēold (58).

pāet wē webrðiað wīde and sīde (81).

fōr pām wōrde, þe se weāldend cwýð (111).

and other like verses. Perhaps a stronger confirmation of this view as applicable to Anglo-Saxon verse is furnished by the following verse than by any one of those given :

and Adomes eāldgewýrhtum (100, WÜLKER),

where the two accents follow each other without thesis, although

GREIN emends the verse by inserting *for* after *and*, but this would not change the accentuation of the verse; it would merely relieve the abruptness of the successive accents, but a succession of two accents is a common occurrence. Examples might be culled *passim* from modern English poetry, of placing in accented positions words usually unaccented, as this is a metrical license so common that it should not be called a license, that is, a variation from the normal verse. Some claim that, where such licenses occur, one accent is wanting in modern English verse; the heroic verse, for example, then contains but *four* accents instead of *five*. I do not see that anything is gained by this interpretation of the structure. The rhythm requires *five* accents in order to affect the ear harmoniously, and I prefer to consider that the accent falls on a light syllable usually unaccented; that, for the sake of the rhythm, a stronger accent than the usual prose accent of the word is given to that particular syllable.

It remains to add a few words as to the *vocabulary* that the translator may use. I should not rule out archaic words, or modern words in older meanings. In translating our older poetry, it is well to preserve the archaic style as far as possible. Intelligibility alone will prescribe a limit to the use of archaic words. Any word that an educated public may be supposed to be familiar with from the reading of English poetry, as far back as the Elizabethan period, is justifiable, to say nothing of the archaic words that living poets have revived. A translator that I wot of has been criticised for translating *gléaw*, "cunning." The word means literally "prudent, wise, skilled in knowledge," and "cunning" has just that meaning in both the Bible and SHAKSPERE. It does not always mean "crafty, sly." The translators of the book of Daniel (i, 4) use the expression, "children . . . skilful in all wisdom, and *cunning* in knowledge," and a dozen examples of a similar use occur in the Bible. SHAKSPERE, in the "Taming of the Shrew," (i, i, 192) uses the verse:

"To get her *cunning* schoolmasters to instruct her,"

and in several other passages "cunning" is used in a like sense.

WILLIAM MORRIS has revived many old words that we should not willingly let die, and there is no fitter place for them

than in the translation of our oldest poetry. As to the six-accent verse of 'Sigurd the Volsung,' it seems to me suitable for the translation of the Anglo-Saxon enlarged verse, but it contains too many accents for the normal verse. It naturally fails to reproduce the rhythmical movement of that verse, and so must be excluded along with the seven-accent ballad-measure. It has, however, a very forcible and striking rhythm of its own, as the following verses will show :

"Thére was a dwélling of kíngs ere the wórld was wáxen óld ;
 Dúkes were the dóor-wards thére, and the róofs were tháched with
 góld ;
 Éarls were the wríghts that wróught it, and sílver-náiled its dóors ;
 Earls wíves were the weáving-wómen, queens' daúghters stréwed
 its floórs ;
 And the másters óf its sóng-craft were the míghtiest mén that
 cást (15)
 The sáils of the stórm of báttle adówn the bíckering blást.
 Thére dwélt men mérry-heárted, and in hópe excéeding gréat
 Mét the goód days and the évil, as they wént the wáy of fáte :
 There the Góds were únforgóttén, yea, whíle they wálked with
 mén,
 Though e'én in that wórld's begínníng rose a múrmur nów and
 agáin (20)
 Of the mídward tíme and the fádíng and the lást of the láttér dáys,
 And the énteríng ín of the térror, and the deáth of the Peóple's
 Práíse."

Here we have three accents to the half-verse, a regular cæsure, and a rhythmical movement resembling that of the anapæstic metre most closely, but the verse often starts with an accent, as in dactylic metre. Here we have, too, the prepositions *of* and *in*, and the prefix *un-* placed in accented positions.

In illustration of the views expressed in this paper, I append a passage from a translation, recently made, of "The Dream of the Rood." The attempt is made to preserve two accents to the half-verse, with cæsure, and occasional alliteration. This can be at best but an approximate imitation of the Anglo-Saxon rhythm, but I think that it is a nearer approach to that rhythm than a more regular modern verse. Each will judge for himself of the correctness of this view. The passage is taken from the beginning of the poem.

THE DREAM OF THE ROOD.

Yea, choicest of dréams I wíll reláte,
 What dréam I dréamt in míddle of níght
 When mórtal mén repósed in rést.
 Methóught I sáw a wóndrous woód
 Tówer aloft with líght bewoúnd, (5)
 Bríghtest of beáms (trees): that beácon was áll
 Begírt with góld; jéwels were stánding
 Fóur at súrfce of eárrh, líkewise wére there fíve
 Abóve on the shóulder-bráce. All ángels of Góð behéld it,
 Fáir thróugh fúture áges; no críminál's cróss was that, (10)
 But hóly spíríts behéld it thére,
 Mén upon eárrh,—all this glórious wórlð:
 Stránge was that víctor-tree, and stáined with síns Í,
 With fóulness defíled. I sáw the trée of glóry
 With vésture adórnéd winsómelý shíne, (15)
 Begírt with góld, [bríght] géms had [thére]
 Wórrhíly déckéd the trée of the wóod.
 Yét thróugh the góld Í míght perceíve
 Old strífe of the wréttched, that fírst it gán
 Drop blóod on the strónger (ríght) síde. With sórróws was Í
 opprésséd, (20)
 Afráíd for the fáirést síght; I sáw the réády beácon
 Chánge in vésture and húe: at tímes with móísture cóveréd,
 Sóíled with cóurse of blóod; at tímes with tréasure adórnéd.²

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² The whole of this poem (156 lines) is translated in MS., but this extract is sufficient to show the method employed. The discussion on this paper did not affect the main question treated in it. For my reply, see the *Proceedings* of the MOD. LANG. ASSOCIATION, 1890.